VISION PLAN
for
DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE

1991

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for
DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE

Prepared by

Somerset Alliance for the Future
&
Molinaro/Rubin Associates
in association with
Wiles Dailey Pronske
PLANNING AND ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS

Prepared for

Somerset Alliance for the Future
Task Force on Town Centers

Sponsored by

Bridgewater Commons Associates
Claremont Properties, Inc.
Forbes, Inc.
Johnson & Johnson
Landmark Management Company
Mid-Jersey Bank
National Westminster Bank NJ
New Jersey Savings Bank
Ozzard, Wharton, Rizzolo, Klein, Muro, Savo & Hogan
Somerset Medical Center
Somerset Savings Bank
Somerset Trust Company

Revised 9/13/91

DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE VISION PLAN

SAF Task Force on Town Centers
Somerville Partners

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DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE VISION PLAN
AS A COMPONENT OF SOMERVILLE'S MASTER PLAN

INTRODUCTION

I. Background

In March of 1989 the Borough of Somerville commissioned a Master Plan for the physical, economic and social development of the Borough of Somerville. In October, 1989 a draft Master Plan was submitted by the Borough's consultant for review and comment to the Mayor's Office, Borough Planning Board, Borough Council and a number of citizen committees. The draft Master Plan addressed six areas or "elements" including: Goals and Policies for the Future, Land Use, (Vehicular) Circulation, Community Facilities, Housing and Regional Issues. In addition, six improvement sub-plans were proposed including: recreation and open space; historic preservation; professional office development; circulation improvement; improvement/use recommendations pertaining to the County Government Complex and the Medical Center Complex; and land use/improvement recommendations for the Central Business District.

Following reviews by the Mayor's Office and the Planning Board it was determined that a special effort was desirable to determine the boundaries, conditions, uses and densities of the Borough's CBD. The Somerset Alliance for the Future (SAF) volunteered to raise the funds needed to hire planning and urban design consultants to draft a downtown plan under the direction of SAF staff and the SAF Town Centers Task Force.

In the late spring of 1990 the Town Centers/Mixed-Use Development Task Force of the Somerset Alliance for the Future sponsored a meeting of representatives from Somerville organizations to explore the future of downtown. The participants included Mayor Michael Kerwin and representatives of Somerville's Borough Council, the Somerville Borough Planning Board, the District Management Corporation, the Somerville Business and Professional Association, the Somerville Parking Authority, the Architectural Review Board, the Somerset County Board of Freeholders, and the Somerset County

Department of Economic Development. The participants agreed to participate in an ad hoc committee, dubbed the Somerville Partners, to provide input and direction for the preparation of the vision plan for the central business district. SAF proposed to fund the planning effort by voluntary contributions from Somerset County business and professional interests. The purpose of the plan would be to establish a shared community vision of what downtown Somerville could be, and to outline an agenda for action to make the vision a reality.

The Vision Plan would indicate in general the type, scale and location of major development and redevelopment projects necessary and desirable in revitalizing the downtown area. Upon completion the Vision Plan would be reviewed and adopted by the Planning Board as a sub-element of the borough's Master Plan. As a sub-element of the Somerville Master Plan the Vision Plan will provide a basis for the creation of a performance-type zoning for the CBD. Performance or flexible zoning concepts are intended to encourage a mix of uses, allow for increased development, beyond a base intensity, as specified performance criteria are met, and enhance the physical quality of downtown area. Performance criteria often include physical design standards and the provision for on and off-site amenities which provide a benefit to the borough.

SAF committed its staff to launch the preparation of the Vision Plan even as the Town Centers/Mixed-Use Development Task Force was raising more than $60,000 to pay the consultants selected to assist in the planning effort. Twelve organizations interested in a healthy downtown Somerville donated funds for the effort. Molinaro/Rubin Associates with Wiles Dailey Pronske, Planning and Engineering Consultants were hired as planning and design consultants for the Vision Plan.

The Vision Plan was developed during the summer and fall of 1990 under the direction of the Town Centers Task Force and with a number of meetings of the Somerville Partners to present interim proposals and to receive input. In addition a number of informal meetings were held with individual property owners to gather additional input. In January of 1991 was presented at two public meetings, and as a supplement to the Messenger-Gazette titled *Somerville Tomorrow*.

II. Somerville CBD: Goals, Objectives and Policies

The Central Business District (CBD) is essential to Somerville's economic vitality and quality of life. Deep concern over the economic performance and physical condition of the CBD led to the establishment of four guiding objectives and ten operational goals directed to creating a revitalized CBD through specific development and redevelopment initiatives. The Vision Plan is intended to support the goals, policies and objectives developed in the Master Plan.

Guiding Goals, Policies and Objectives

Housing Goal:

Provide a range of housing types to meet varied resident population's needs as well as to preserve established residential areas.

The Vision Plan proposes the preservation and enhancement of the residential neighborhoods at the east end of the CBD through new residential infill development. The Vision Plan specifically supports the Meadow Street housing project proposed by Community Caring for its Own. The Vision Plan also identifies opportunities for new multi-family residential development relating to existing neighborhoods. The Vision Plan also encourages the continued adaptive reuse of the upper levels of existing commercial structures in th CBD for residential uses.

Local Economy Goal

Encourage development and improvement of non-residential uses in designated areas.

The Vision Plan proposes that the economic vitality of the Central Business District be enhanced through the revitalization of existing commercial uses and structures, and through the development or redevelopment of key sites as commercial anchors. New development and redevelopment should actively encourage employment opportunities for borough residents. The Vision plan recognizes that this goal can only be accomplished by the combined efforts and cooperation of the Borough of Somerville, the District Management Corporation, the Somerville Business and Professional Association, and individual property owners, tenants, and developers, as well as the Somerset Alliance for the Future.

Open Space Goal

Continue the creation of local park and recreation systems designed to provide a variety of passive and active recreational opportunities to all members of the borough.

The Vision Plan recognizes the importance of the existing park and open space system to the development of the CBD and to the Borough. The park system along Peters Brook provides an edge and gateway to downtown from the east, and provides an important amenity for the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Other important existing open spaces in downtown include the Court House Green, and the Borough Hall grounds and Veterans Memorial. The Vision Plan supports the development of the streetscape as a pedestrian amenity and as the site of the Tour of Somerville, street fairs, parades, etc. In addition the Vision Plan proposes the development of public or semi-public open spaces within the major anchor developments developed around the winter garden and quadrangle concepts.

Circulation Goal

Develop a coordinated road system which enables the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

The Vision Plan endorses the extension of Urban Drive to Vanderveer Parkway and the extension of South Doughty Avenue to Route 206 as the landfill site is developed, as well as other roadway and intersection improvements identified in the Master Plan. The Vision Plan would also encourage major employers to work with the newly formed Somerset Alliance/Transportation Management Association (Ridewise) to implement traffic management programs to reduce peak hour congestion on borough streets. The Vision Plan also recognizes that the traffic impact of major development projects will require study and review as projects are proposed, and that the mitigation of traffic impacts will be a cooperative effort between the developers and the borough and others.

Central Business District Goal

Improve the physical appearance and mix of businesses in the CBD to further create an attractive and diversified business area.

This goal is the impetus for the entire Vision Plan. The basis for the Vision Plan is the maintenance and enhancement of key assets including existing uses and activities, and the existing built environment through the development of the streetscape program, a facade improvement program, infill development, and the development of key anchor sites. Public, community and cultural uses are also important components of the development program. The ultimate goal of the Vision Plan is to enhance the viability of Somerville as a place to live, work and shop, and to improve the CBD's position as a regional attraction. As previously stated the Vision Plan recognizes that the accomplishment of this goal will be the result of the combined efforts and cooperation of the Borough of Somerville, the District Management Corporation, the Somerville

Business and Professional Association, and individual property owners, tenants, and developers, as well as the Somerset Alliance for the Future.

Design Goal

Improve the visual appearance of the business areas while protecting residential neighborhoods from encroachment and insure improvements are made which respect the architectural character of the borough.

Downtown Somerville contains the most significant collection of 19th century and early 20th century commercial architecture in Somerset County. The Vision Plan recognizes the importance of unique physical characteristics of the CBD and supports the maintenance and enhancement of the existing character through the streetscape program and facade improvement program. New developments, small infill projects and major anchor developments, should be designed to be compatible in design and scale to the context of the existing built environment.

County Expansion Goal

Encourage county expansion opportunities to certain designated areas to limit and adverse effects of expansion on established residential neighborhoods.

The Vision Plan identifies the site bounded by East Main Street, North Bridge Street, East High Street and Mechanic Street as the county campus

In addition to the above Master Plan Goals the Master Plan identified four objectives for the development of the CBD. The intent of the Vision Plan is to accomplish these four objectives.

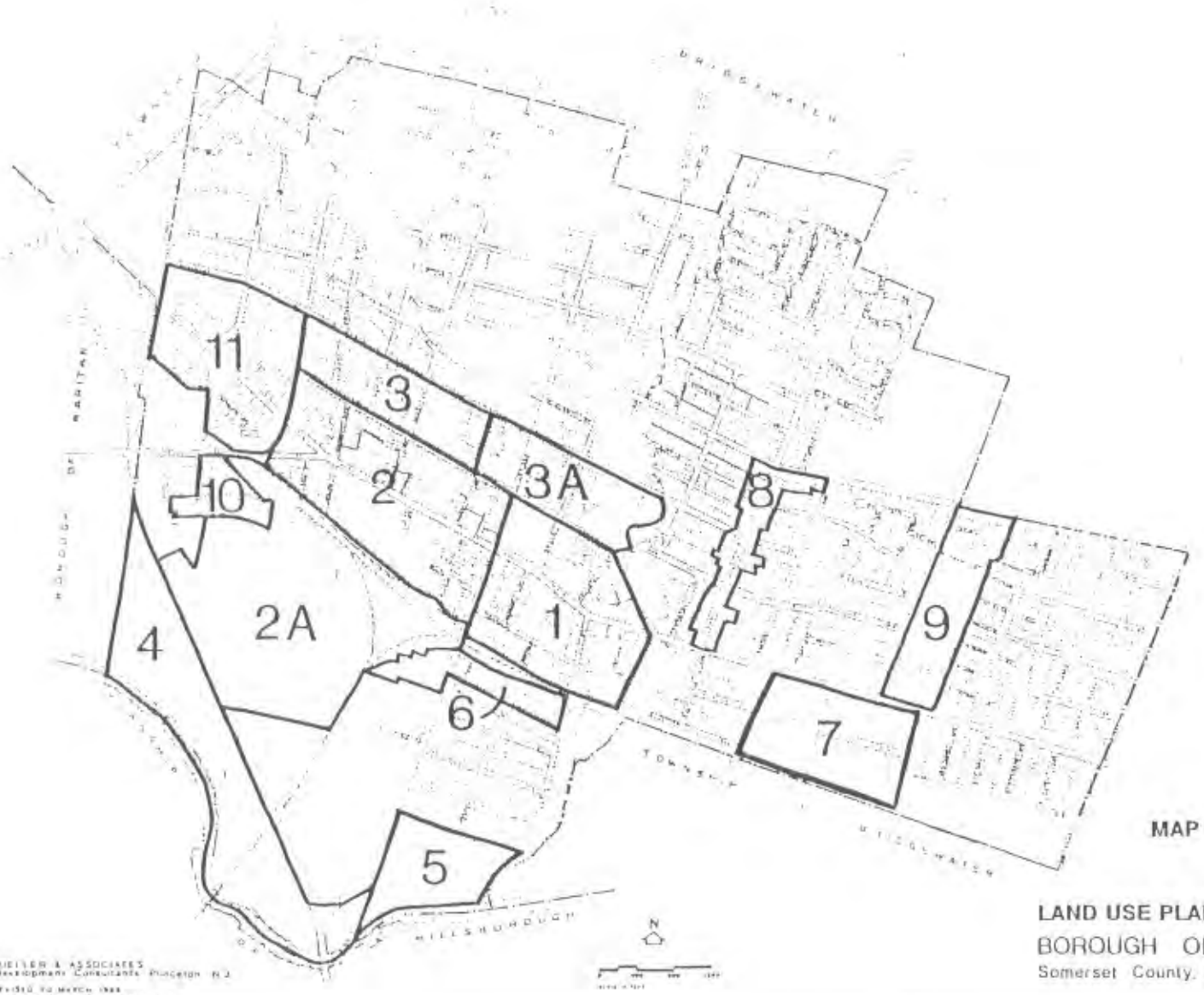
Objective 1: To revitalize and enhance Somerville's downtown commercial district as a shopping area.

Objective 2: To create high value, high amenity mixed-use developments which provide competitive office space, in-town housing, specialty retail and public amenities.

Objective 3: To attract and contain professional offices within the CBD [and transitional areas] to prevent further conversion of residential properties within neighborhood settings.

Objective 4: To create a destination place through cultural and entertainment offerings which enhance the quality of life within the Borough and which draw "day tourists" from throughout the County for shopping and leisure activities.

The CBD includes areas 1 and 2 on Map #2, Land Use Plan Changes, of the Master Plan prepared by Lenaz, Mueller & Associates. The transitional areas include portions of areas 3 and 3A.



MAP #2

LAND USE PLAN CHANGES

BOROUGH OF SOMERVILLE

Somerset County, New Jersey

LENAZ, HUETLER & ASSOCIATES
Planning Development Consultants Princeton N.J.

ANALYSIS

I. Regional Context

Somerville is located at the geographic center of Somerset County. It is bounded by Bridgewater Township, the Borough of Raritan and Hillsborough Township. Somerville's CBD is approximately one mile from Bridgewater Commons. The Duke Estate provides an attractive open space character to the southern boundary of the borough. With an area of 2.37 square miles and an estimated 1989 population of 11,190 (Somerset County Planning Board) Somerville is one of the most densely populated (5,663 people/square mile) communities in the county. Somerville's downtown Central Business District is one of the most significant and most cohesive urban centers in the county offering a vital Main Street and unique collection of 19th and early 20th century architecture.

Somerville is equally accessible to larger metropolitan areas. The distance to Manhattan is 35 miles and Philadelphia is 75 miles by auto. Princeton, New Brunswick, Morristown and Summit are all within a 20 mile radius of the County Seat. Within a 2 mile radius of the intersection of Main and Bridge streets is the Duke Estate, a 2,200 acre segment of Somerset County preserved as open space; Bridgewater Commons; and several major employers.

II ASSETS & CONSTRAINTS

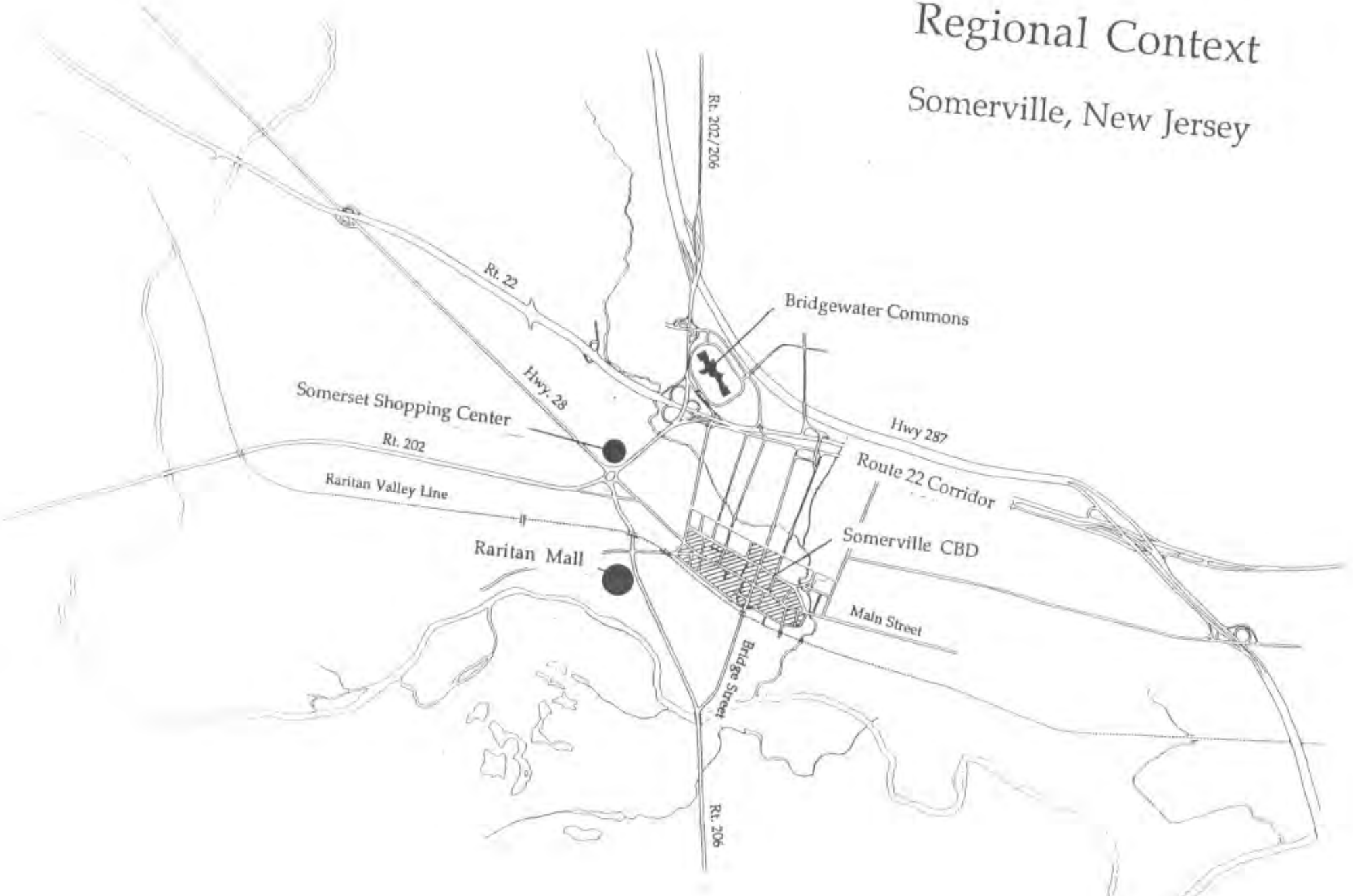
Somerville is a mature community with stable residential neighborhoods, good community services and facilities, and an active downtown. Key assets include:

Government

Government provides a substantial work force, is an attraction for an additional work force having regular business with government, and

Regional Context

Somerville, New Jersey



generates daily visitors from the region. Government workers and visitors support restaurants, retail, personal and business services, hotels and in-town housing. Government entities in Somerville are the State Department of Labor, Somerset County and the Borough of Somerville.

Office

Office uses generate a daytime work force supporting restaurants, retailing, personal and business services, hotels, meeting spaces and in-town housing. Office uses in Somerville cater primarily to professionals such as attorneys, architects, insurance agents, real estate brokers, and accountants.

Office development in downtown has been limited in recent years. Most new office space has been created as a result of converting residential buildings to professional office uses, and other space has come from the construction of small infill buildings. The largest office developments are the Court House Square South (75 Franklin Street) occupied by the New Jersey Department of Labor, and Post Office Plaza (50 Division Street). An office building has been proposed for Franklin Street south of Court House Square, and office development has been discussed for the New Jersey Savings Bank site.

Banks

Banks provide a work force to support restaurants and retail, a personal service to downtown employees and residents, and most importantly establish a base for community investment. Banks in and adjacent to downtown Somerville include Mid Jersey National Bank, New Jersey Savings Bank, Somerset Trust Company, National Westminster Bank NJ and the Somerset Savings Bank.

Retail

Retail uses, including restaurants, provide goods and services for employees, residents and visitors, and create daytime, evening, weekday and weekend activity. Over 170 stores, shops and restaurants exist in the Somerville CBD. Approximately 25% of the shops downtown are food related, ranging from fine dining to the Pathmark Supercenter. The remainder of the stores are almost equally divided between specialty shops such as shoe stores, women's and men's apparel, and service and convenience retail such as pharmacies, beauty salons, shoe repair and laundromats.

Due to increased competition from strip shopping centers located along the highway corridors downtown Somerville has become increasingly dependent upon the captive market of downtown workers and nearby residents. Strip shopping centers and moderately priced malls compete directly with the traditional downtown retail. Nearby Bridgewater Commons tends to dominate the regional market for upscale national chain stores. These factors have created a trend toward a limited retail mix in downtown focusing more and more on service and convenience retail, and restaurants. To counteract this trend Somerville must find a niche in the regional market that provides a base of distinctive shops that enriches the retail mix and attracts a broader base of patrons.

Culture/Activities/Special Events

Cultural facilities, activities and special events act as activity generators and attractions supported by residents, employees, and visitors. Somerville has a number of existing facilities and traditional events that provide a base for regional (and even international) attractions:

- The Kugler-Anderson Memorial Tour of Somerville is an international bicycling event attracting tens of thousands of visitors to Somerville each year.

- The U. S. Bicycling Hall of Fame is in its embryonic stage of development. Combined with the Kugler-Anderson Memorial Tour of Somerville and potential ancillary developments such as an indoor velodrome, Hall of Fame museum, and a multi-activity recreation complex the Hall of Fame has the potential for becoming a mecca for bicycling enthusiasts from around the world.

- Local historic attractions include the Wallace House and the Old Dutch Parsonage near downtown, and the Firemen's Museum located on North Doughty Avenue. Although the CBD is not an officially designated historic district, many of the buildings within the CBD are meritorious and worthy of consideration for preservation and restoration.

- The Court House Green with the Lord Memorial Fountain is the site of the Vince Giardina Memorial Concert Series, a series of outdoor concerts held Friday nights during the summer which proved to be most popular.

- Other popular events include street fairs, held twice during the summer months on Main Street, and Friday Night Cruzin' an informal display of vintage automobiles held every Friday night.

Somerville lacks adequate cultural/entertainment and conference facilities, including movie theaters, and an indoor venue for live theater, music, night time entertainment and corporate meetings.

Parks & Open Space

Somerville's park system consists of eight parks along Peters Brook. The parks provide for a wide variety of activities and facilities including lighted baseball fields, picnic areas, tennis courts, swimming pools and open fields. Peters Brook and the adjacent park land establish the eastern boundary of downtown and provide a focus for residential neighborhoods and development as part of the eastern gateway.

Other public open spaces include the Court House Green (the site of the summer concert series), and the Borough Hall grounds. The Veterans Memorial terminating the west end of Main Street establishes a western gateway into downtown.

Residential

Somerville's population resides in a variety of housing types including single-family homes, duplexes, townhouses, apartment buildings, upper level residences in the downtown area, and a senior citizens center. On the whole residential neighborhoods in Somerville are well developed and stable.

At the east end of downtown the Park Avenue and Hamilton Street neighborhoods adjacent to the park have been somewhat eroded by noncompatible commercial and light industrial uses. These neighborhoods should be maintained and enhanced by infill residential development such as the proposed 32-unit Meadow Street project.

Historically the upper levels of downtown commercial buildings have been used for housing. This pattern of residential use is evident in downtown Somerville. The recent development of the Somerville Arms and other existing housing above retail or in converted warehouses indicates a demand for upper level residential uses in downtown.

Access & Circulation

Somerville is adjacent to major highway corridors. State Highway 28 (Main Street) runs directly through the CBD. U.S. Routes 22 and 206 bound Somerville on the north and south respectively. Direct access to U.S. Route 202 is provided via the Somerville Circle and access to Interstate 287 is provided via Routes 202, 22, and 28. This concentration of highways makes Somerville accessible from throughout the county and beyond. The perceived difficulty in accessibility to downtown is a result of difficult interchanges and poor signage directing drivers to Somerville.

The principal east-west circulation through downtown Somerville is carried by Main Street (State Highway 28). Urban Drive and the proposed extension, High Street and Cliff Street bordering the CBD provide alternative east-west routes, but avoid the commercial district. Bridge Street provides the only true north-south circulation to and through downtown. Other streets such as Mountain Avenue, Davenport Street and Hamilton Street provide access to downtown from the north or the south but do not provide through circulation alternatives.

Transit

NJ Transit provides both bus and train service to and from Somerville. The Raritan Valley Line provides rail service to Newark and New York with an "Airlink" to Newark Airport. NJ Transit Routes 65 and 66 offer bus service to Newark.

The Somerset County Office of Transportation operates the SCOOT Minibus service for the elderly and handicapped in Somerset County. The SCOOT route runs between Montgomery Shopping Center along Route 206 through Somerville to the County Library/Mental Health Center and to the Raritan Valley Community College.

Parking

Public parking in the CBD is provided by four borough surface lots providing 470 parking spaces. In addition there are approximately 450 metered street parking spaces in the commercial district, and unmetered street parking in residential areas. Many individual commercial uses provide at least some private parking for employees and patrons, including more than 600 parking spaces at the Landmark Mall.

Public parking in downtown serves both long term employee parking and short term shopper and visitor parking. For current uses parking supply seems adequate. A variety of metered parking terms (time limits and rates)

and policies for the public parking lots, including permit parking, are in effect or are being considered. New developments will need to provide adequate parking for their use.

III. Conclusions

Assets of downtown Somerville include a stable community with a mix of uses providing a solid base for the continuing revitalization of downtown. The principle constraints to the development and continued prosperity of downtown, however, are both real and perceived.

Although Somerville is located at the center of Somerset County at the intersection of the county's major highway corridors, direct access to downtown can be difficult due to traffic congestion and difficult turning movements. These are not problems unique to Somerville and traffic mitigation policies and programs are needed for the entire region. As traffic congestion increases and the operation of the individual automobile becomes more expensive the Somerville train station and bus service will become increasingly valuable assets.

The other principle constraint, and perhaps the most important constraint facing Somerville, has been the lack of a development plan identifying appropriate development sites, and a development program and strategy. The purpose of this planning process is to provide that development plan, to provide a vision for the future. As developer and visionary James Rouse stated in a recent visit to Somerville, "Rational visions induce action. It's a matter of setting that vision and sailing for it."

THE PLAN

I. Seven Principles

The plan is based on seven basic principles that establish direction and criteria to guide the preparation of the urban design framework, composition and economic vitality, and development strategy for downtown Somerville. The Urban Land Institute publication "Designing the Successful Downtown" suggests that the following principles be observed:

1. Promote Diversity of Use

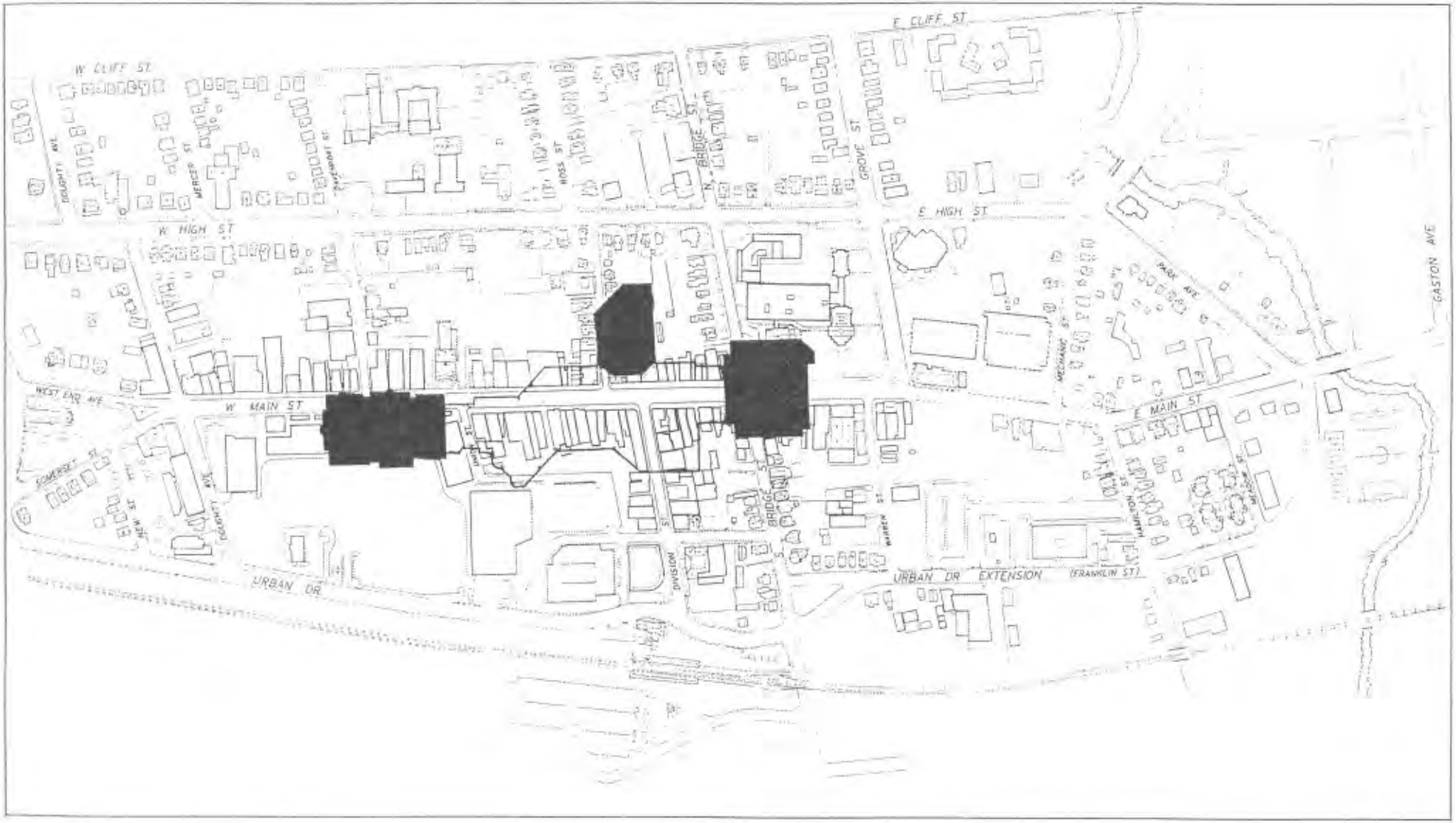
The essence of a successful downtown is people. A diversity of uses will draw more people from a greater area more often and for greater periods of time. Downtown should provide a range of activities to do and things to see to maximize the potential for market synergy.

Somerville possesses a variety of uses in downtown including government, office, retail, cultural facilities, events, recreation and residential. These uses need to be enhanced and expanded where appropriate.

2. Emphasize Compactness

Compactness concentrates uses and activities to create a critical mass promoting pedestrian activity and vitality. Somerville has the advantage of possessing a very compact traditional commercial core with few voids, such as vacant storefronts and lots.

Somerville's CBD provides an appropriately compact pedestrian core. A comparison can be made with typical suburban shopping malls. The plan of Bridgewater Commons overlayed on a downtown map would extend (from Stern's to Macy's) from the Landmark shopping center to the County Court House.



BRIDGEWATER COMMONS OVERLAY

WILES
DAILEY
PRONSKE

Developments peripheral to the core need not be discouraged. Developments on the periphery can contribute to the vitality of the commercial core provided they are within walking distance of the core.

3. Foster Intensity

Development densities should establish downtown as the center of activity for Somerville. Care must be taken to concentrate the mix of activities to achieve a critical mass at the heart of Somerville, and to ensure that new developments do not overwhelm the existing character or market potential of downtown. Appropriately scaled infill development and the productive use of upper levels for office or residential uses help to foster intensity without undermining the scale or character of downtown.

Larger development sites (such as the Eastern Gateway site and the Landmark site) should be intensely developed in keeping with the scale and character of Main Street. Locating taller buildings to the center and to the back of the sites, and visually breaking up the massing of larger structures helps establish the sense of human scale prevalent in downtown Somerville.

To foster increased intensity of special development sites in the downtown area performance-type or flexible zoning concepts should be incorporated into the borough zoning ordinance. Under performance or flexible zoning concepts increased development intensity is permitted exchange for physical design features and amenities that provide a benefit to the residents of the borough or help to mitigate potentially unreasonable adverse impacts caused by development.

4. Ensure Balance

To ensure the realization of the full economic development potential of downtown Somerville a multiple-use approach to revitalization should be promoted. Day and evening as well as weekday and weekend uses and

activity generators should be developed and interspersed throughout downtown. A mix of uses should be developed to ensure a variety of day and evening activity throughout the week.

In addition to the programmatic balance mentioned above a physical balance should be achieved as well. Strategic activity generators should be located as anchors to promote activity along Main Street between anchors, similar to the strategy used by major shopping centers in locating anchor department stores.

5. **Provide for Accessibility**

A positive balance between pedestrian and vehicular circulation should be established. A well defined circulation pattern can ensure efficient vehicular access as well as a quality pedestrian access. A pedestrian emphasis is required to encourage street activity, and vehicular access and parking should be convenient and efficient to encourage visitors to come downtown.

A fundamental principle in development planning and building rehabilitation should be accessibility for the disabled. All facilities and structures in downtown should be available to all the public.

6. **Create Functional Linkages**

Linkages between downtown activity centers and anchors should be convenient and physically attractive forming a network of integrated streetscape treatments, open spaces and active street level uses to achieve true market synergy. Linkages are also important between downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

Additionally there is the potential to link downtown Somerville and Bridgewater Commons and surrounding employment centers with a transit shuttle. A pedestrian link over Route 22 from Somerville to the mall area should also be encouraged. This link should be for pedestrians

only and should be accomplished through state, county, Bridgewater and Somerville cooperation, as well as with cooperation with Bridgewater Commons.

7. **Build a Positive Identity**

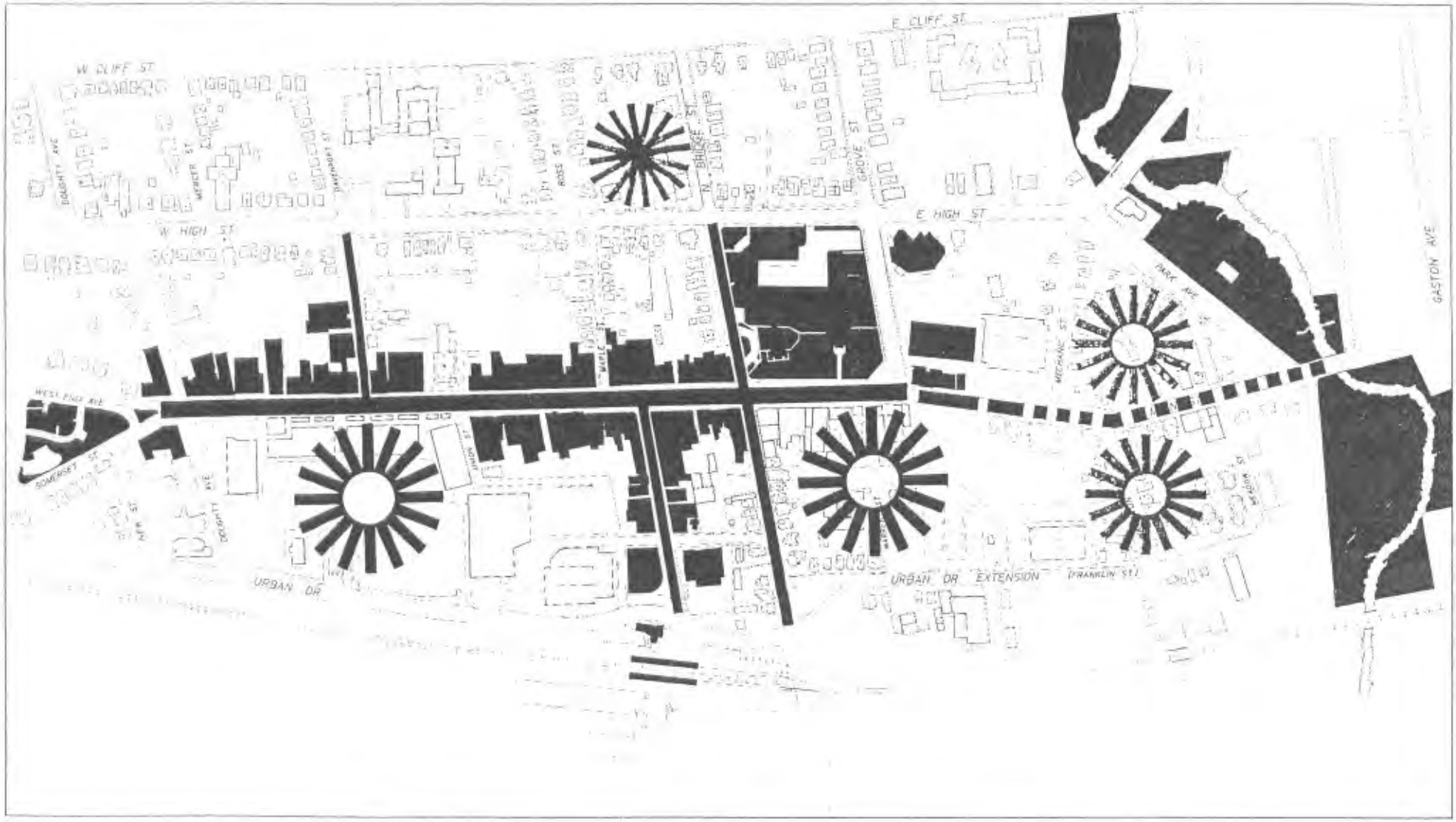
Downtown must project a positive identity to be marketable as a destination for shopping, cultural and entertainment activities, working and living, as well as a location for investment. Retail, cultural facilities, events and recreation establish an active and exciting image for downtown. Office and government workers provide weekday activity and a base for retail and other uses. Residential uses provide a safe, well maintained, and stable image.

The quality of the physical environment, the streetscape and buildings can also enhance the positive identity of downtown. Downtown Somerville, as the county seat and the most significant commercial center, has the historic character and physical scale to be used as the basis for creating a positive identity.

II. Urban Design Framework

The urban design framework provides the organizing framework for creating a logical and cohesive development strategy. The framework uses key physical assets as a basis for locating major development proposals. The framework consists of five principle elements:

- The Main Street/Commercial Spine
- Anchors
- Transitional District Opportunity Sites
- Linkages
- Peters Brook/Open Space
- Residential Development and Infill



URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

- MAIN STREET/COMMERCIAL SPINE
- EXISTING COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES
- GOVERNMENT & QUASI-PUBLIC
- COMMERCIAL ANCHORS
- RESIDENTIAL ANCHORS
- PARKS & OPEN SPACE
- LINKAGES
- TRANSITIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

WILES DAILEY PRONSKE

A. Main Street/Commercial Spine

Main Street is the heart of Somerville and the principle organizing element of downtown. It is the axis and through the central business district, the location of government, the primary shopping street and the premier commercial address.

Main Street includes a significant collection of 19th and early 20th century commercial architecture. This rich architectural heritage, combined with one-of-a-kind shops and attractions, personalized merchandizing, and an appropriate streetscape provides the basis for establishing a unique market environment.

B. Anchors

Anchors include important public buildings and spaces, and major activity centers and generators. Main Street is anchored by Borough Hall on its west end and by the Somerset County complex at Bridge Street. These functions should be maintained and enhanced. The County is in the midst of a major expansion program with the construction of new jail and administration buildings and the renovation of the historic 1909 Somerset County Court House. The use of the Court House Green for public events and performances enhances the function of the county site as an anchor for downtown Somerville.

Two major mixed-use development sites are identified at either end of Main Street offering the potential to establish major activity anchors in conjunction with the governmental anchors. This concept allows downtown to operate much like a regional shopping center with mixed-use developments acting as department stores anchoring the ends of the street and drawing patrons past stores in between. The development program for the mixed-use developments should include: office, retail, cultural/entertainment, conference, hotel and residential uses. The cultural/entertainment conference center combined with the retail components of the mixed-use program provide the potential for creating

a regional attraction. The mixed-use developments provide the greatest potential for major new economic investment.

The NJ Transit Station is also an important anchor in downtown. As traffic mitigation efforts are instituted in the county and more emphasis is placed on public transit the station will have even greater importance in the future, particularly as an attraction for nearby residential development. The Transit Station combined with the U. S. Post Office and the Post Office Plaza Building create a significant activity center anchoring the south edge of downtown.

C. Transitional District Opportunity Sites

The Transitional District along High Street offers additional development opportunities. This district is a mix of residential and commercial uses providing a transition from the commercial core to the residential neighborhoods to the north. In order for these developments to support downtown revitalization they must be linked to downtown by appropriate pedestrian connections.

The New Jersey Savings Bank site and the adjacent block to the east provide an important development opportunity site on the north edge of downtown establishing an employment attraction that complements the county government complex as well as the Main Street commercial district. Developments on these blocks should be sensitive to the surrounding neighborhoods and should be carefully designed and scaled to provide an appropriate transition between commercial development and the adjacent neighborhoods.

D. Linkages

Linkages connect various anchors, districts and neighborhoods to the Main Street spine and to each other. Essentially each of the north-south streets intersecting Main Street is a linkage to adjacent developments and neighborhoods. Key linkages include Bridge Street, Division Street,

Davenport Street, and the alleyways connecting public parking lots to Main Street.

E. **Peters Brook/Open Space**

Peters Brook and the adjacent borough park land is a key element of the urban design framework. It provides a natural boundary and gateway to downtown, and it is the major recreational feature in downtown. The park land also provides an important amenity for downtown residential development on adjacent blocks.

Parks along Peters Brook wind throughout the borough and provide the potential to link the borough's park system to a regional park and open space system. The system could include connections to the Raritan River and the Duke Gardens to the south and to Bridgewater Commons to the north.

F. **Residential Development**

The neighborhoods adjacent to Peters Brook can provide convenient in-town living and an attractive entrance to downtown. These neighborhoods should be preserved and enhanced with new residential construction and infill residential development. Inappropriate commercial uses in these neighborhoods should be phased out over time, however neighborhood support retail is appropriate and should be encouraged.

The use of the upper levels of commercial buildings for residential uses is a time honored tradition with a positive track record in downtown Somerville. The continued use and conversion of upper levels for housing should be encouraged. It provides 24-hour activity and enhances the vitality of the downtown.

III. Districts

A. Main Street/Commercial District

The primary commercial district in downtown Somerville extends from Borough Hall to Grove Street and from the railroad tracks to mid-block north of Main Street. The commercial district is the main shopping and activity center in Somerville. It includes office, retail, cultural facilities, and residential uses. The character of the district is defined by the 19th and early 20th century commercial architecture.

Issues and Recommendations

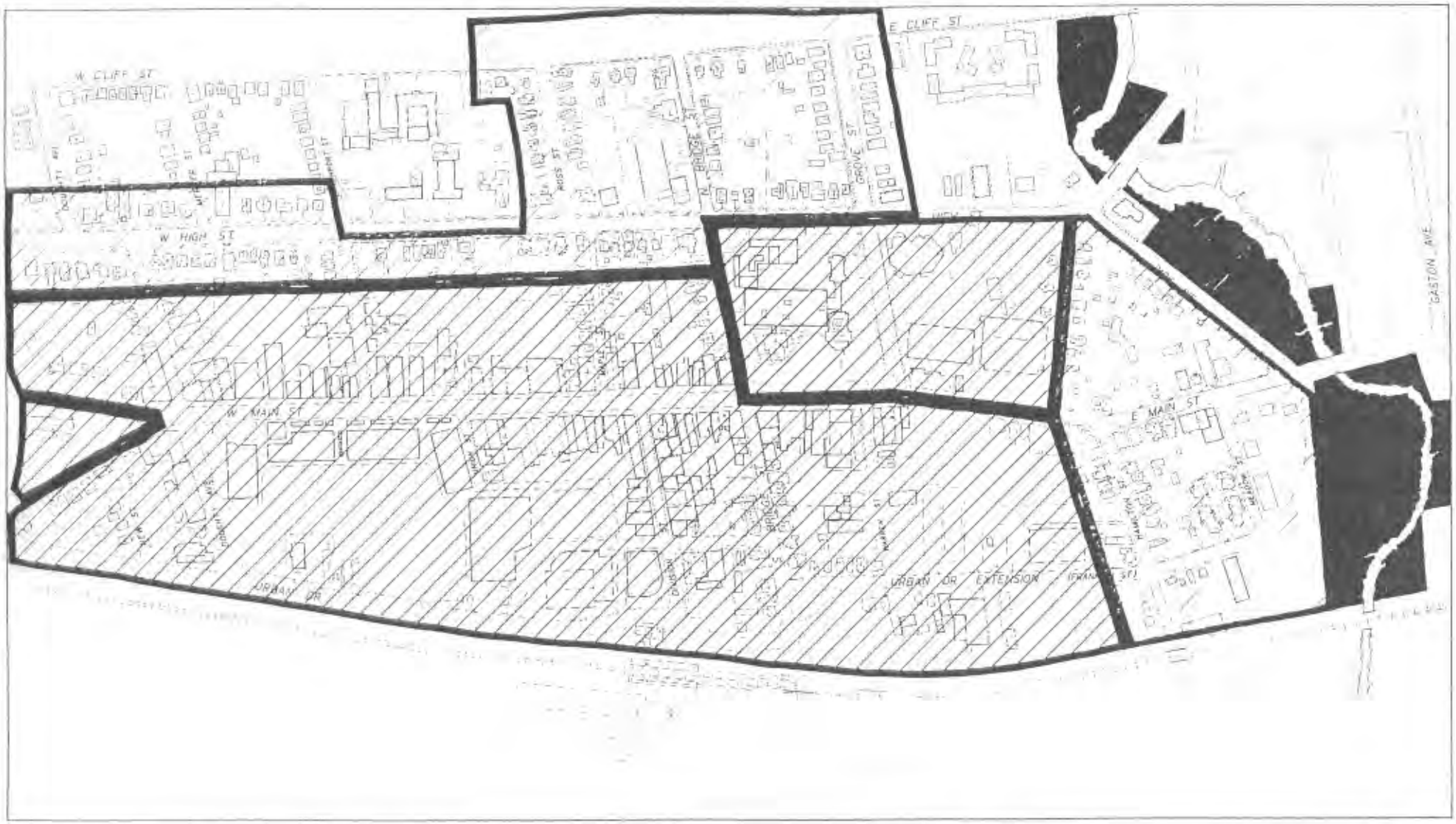
The character of the commercial architecture is an important asset for Somerville. Over the years changes to building facades, particularly storefronts, and infill projects have not always been appropriate. As a result the overall visual character of the street environment has deteriorated.

- **Institute a financing and technical assistance program to encourage property owners and merchants to renovate their building facades and storefronts.**

- **Infill projects and new construction should be designed to be compatible with the positive characteristics of the existing buildings and environment.**

Vacant storefronts and an over abundance of service and convenience establishments reduces the attractiveness of Main Street as a shopping magnate.

- **Establish a marketing and management program to help attract new tenants that will reinforce downtown as a regional shopping attraction.**



DISTRICTS

GOVERNMENT

COMMERCIAL

TRANSITION

RESIDENTIAL

PARK

WILES DAILEY PRONSKE

- **The management program should also coordinate special events and promotional programing.**

The quality and maintenance of the streetscape has been kept to minimal standards and is not currently viewed as an amenity for downtown.

- **Plan, design and implement the streetscape program proposed by the District Management Corporation. Components of the streetscape program should include pavement, light standards, signage, street furniture, trees and plantings, art, etc..**

- **The management program should be responsible for the maintenance, including garbage removal, of the public spaces.**

Vacant and underutilized sites create voids and discourage pedestrian activity.

- **Infill projects should be encourage and should be designed to be compatible with the character and scale of the existing buildings and environment.**

A number of buildings have vacant or underutilized upper levels.

- **Encourage the use of upper levels for office or residential purposes.**

- **Plan and Construct new development projects when market support is available.**

B. Transitional District

The zone north of the Main Street/Commercial District fronting High Street is a transitional zone. The district is a mix of residential and commercial uses and makes the transition from the commercial core of downtown along Main Street to the residential neighborhoods to the

north. The commercial uses within this district are primarily housed in converted residences.

The Transitional District also includes the two blocks bounded by Ross Street, Cliff Street, Grove Street and High Street. These blocks contain a mix of residential, office conversions and commercial uses. The New Jersey Savings Bank has indicated a need to develop its site for its new headquarters.

Issues and Recommendations

Where vacant lots or surface parking lots front the street voids are created that disrupt the continuity and vitality of the district.

- **Infill projects should be compatible with the architectural character and scale of the adjacent neighborhood.**

- **Parking should be located behind the buildings away from the street. Whenever possible parking should be consolidated with parking for adjacent developments or public parking.**

- **There is a need for additional office space, for law and other professional offices, in Somerville. Transitional areas can provide some of that need. Office conversions should be limited to the transitional areas to reduce the continued conversion of residential areas to office use, and provide a transition from CBD to neighborhoods districts.**

C. Governmental Districts

Two governmental districts have been identified. Borough Hall is located on a triangular site that provides a visual as well as physical terminus to Main Street. In addition to government offices Borough Hall also houses the Somerville Public Library. Somerset County facilities, including the historic County Court House, are primarily located on the two blocks

bounded by East Main Street, North Bridge Street, East High Street and Mechanic Street.

Issues and Recommendations

Government uses in the downtown area are an important asset providing a significant work force and employment opportunity, and an attraction for other office development and visitors.

- **Both the Borough of Somerville and Somerset County should establish long term needs and master plans for facility development.**

- **Somerset County should fully utilize the two block campus it has begun to develop.**

- **The borough working with the fire companies should develop a plan for the future needs of each of the fire companies to ensure adequate protection for borough residents. The plan should include the possibility of a new site for the Lincoln Hose Company if it needs to be relocated by redevelopment.**

D. East End Residential District

The east end of downtown from Mechanic Street and Hamilton Street to Peters Brook contains a substantial residential neighborhood intermingled with some commercial uses. The district is the gateway into downtown from the east.

Issues and Recommendations

There are a number of vacant lots and some of existing commercial uses are incompatible with the residential environment.

- **Incompatible uses should be phased out over time and converted to residential uses or compatible neighborhood retail and service uses.**

- Infill projects should be designed to be compatible in architectural character and scale with the existing residential neighborhoods.

- The potential for relocating existing houses from sites in the way of new development and should be explored.

- A mix of housing types, including market rate, for sale and rental, elderly, and single and multi-family should be explored.

- The Meadow Street residential project currently proposed for a site at the corner of Meadow Street and Franklin Street should be implemented.

IV. Vehicular Circulation and Parking

Vehicular Circulation

Vehicular circulation is well established in downtown Somerville. Main Street (State Route 28) is the principle east-west street and the spine through the central business district. It links downtown with Raritan and the Somerville Circle (U. S. Routes 202, 206), to the west and Bound Brook and Middlesex to the east. Bridge Street is the primary north-south access linking downtown to Highway 22 and Bridgewater to the north and U. S. Route 206 to the south. Mountain Avenue is a link to U. S. Routes 22, 202/206 (north), and the Bridgewater Commons. High Street and Urban Drive (with the extension) parallel Main Street to the north and south respectively and can serve as limited alternative routes for through traffic.

Issues and Recommendations

The Vision Plan acknowledges and endorses the series of physical and operational improvements identified in the Somerville Master Plan. As new development and redevelopment projects are proposed the impact of these developments on traffic should be determined and appropriately

mitigated. Circulation improvements required as a result of new development will require cooperation between the developers and the borough.

- Complete the Urban Drive extension to Vanderveer Parkway

- The proposed extension of South Doughty Avenue under the railroad tracks to U.S. 206 should be implemented as the Landfill Site is developed.

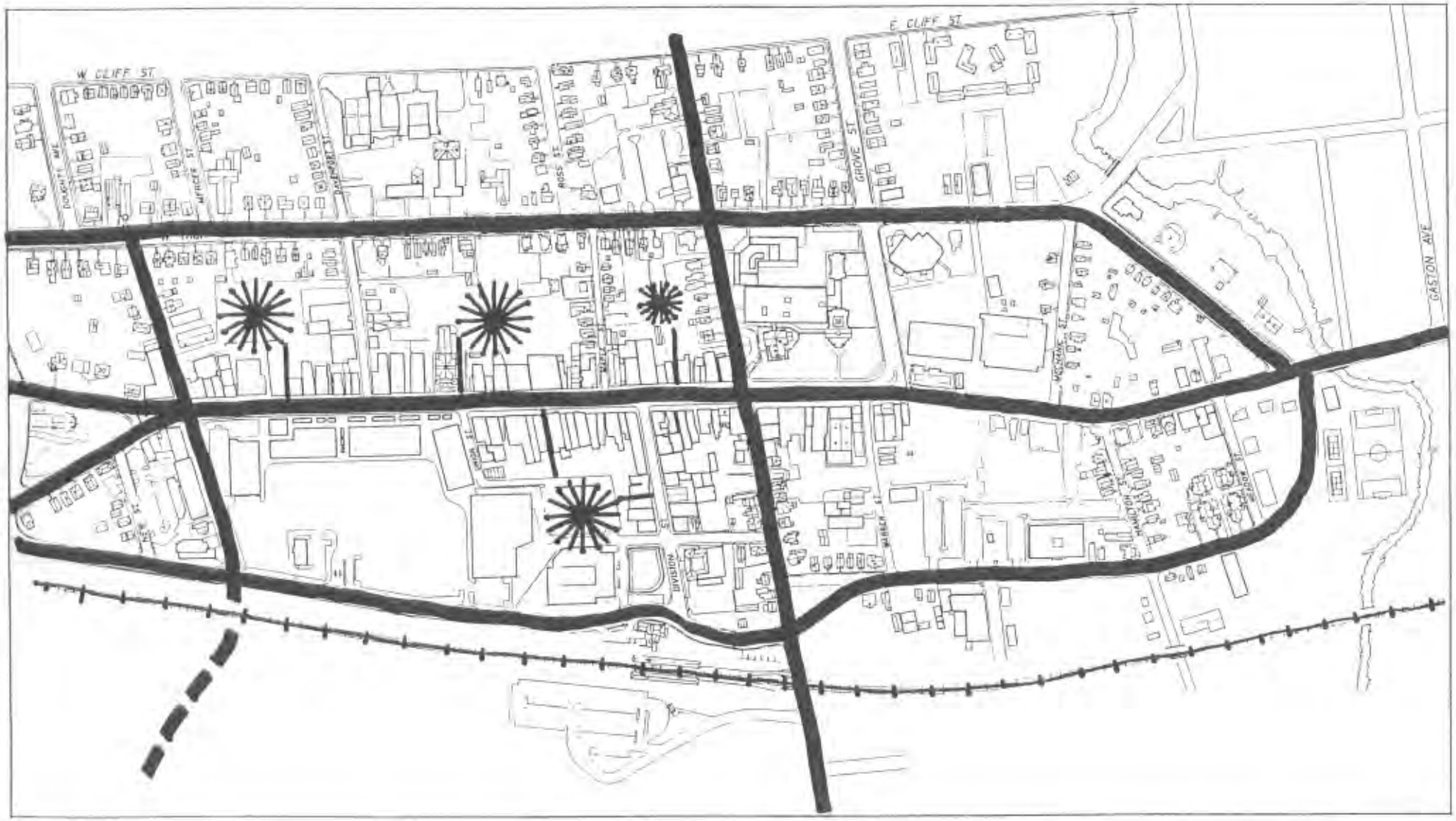
- Widen South Bridge Street in conjunction with the mixed-use development to improve turning movements at the intersection of Bridge Street and Main Street.

Parking

Parking is a key component relating to the success of downtown Somerville as a retail and office center. Inadequate parking availability, or even the perception of inadequate parking, can be detrimental to the success of downtown as a regional attraction. Currently there are over 900 metered parking spaces in Somerville's CBD divided nearly equally between four borough surface parking lots and on-street parking. In addition many individual properties and developments provide their own parking.

The borough parking lots, and to a great extent private parking areas, are located in the interior of blocks establishing parking quadrangles. This pattern allows the street fronts to be occupied by buildings and storefronts, eliminating voids and gaps in the streetscape, and reinforcing the cohesion and activity of the pedestrian environment. This concept should be reinforced and enhanced.

- To the extent possible consolidate private visitor parking and public parking in the interior of the blocks.



CIRCULATION

PRIMARY CIRCULATION

PUBLIC PARKING

NJ TRANSIT

PEDESTRIAN LINKAGE

WILES DAILEY PRONSKE

- Enhance the visual attractiveness and pedestrian amenities and safety of parking lots through landscaping and lighting.

- Rear and side entrances of buildings visible from parking lots should provide a finished and inviting appearance and identity.
- Provide attractive pedestrian links between parking lots and the adjacent streets.

- Ensure that new developments provide adequate parking using shared parking concepts.

- Establish appropriate parking policies for short term shopping and visitor parking, and for long term employee parking.

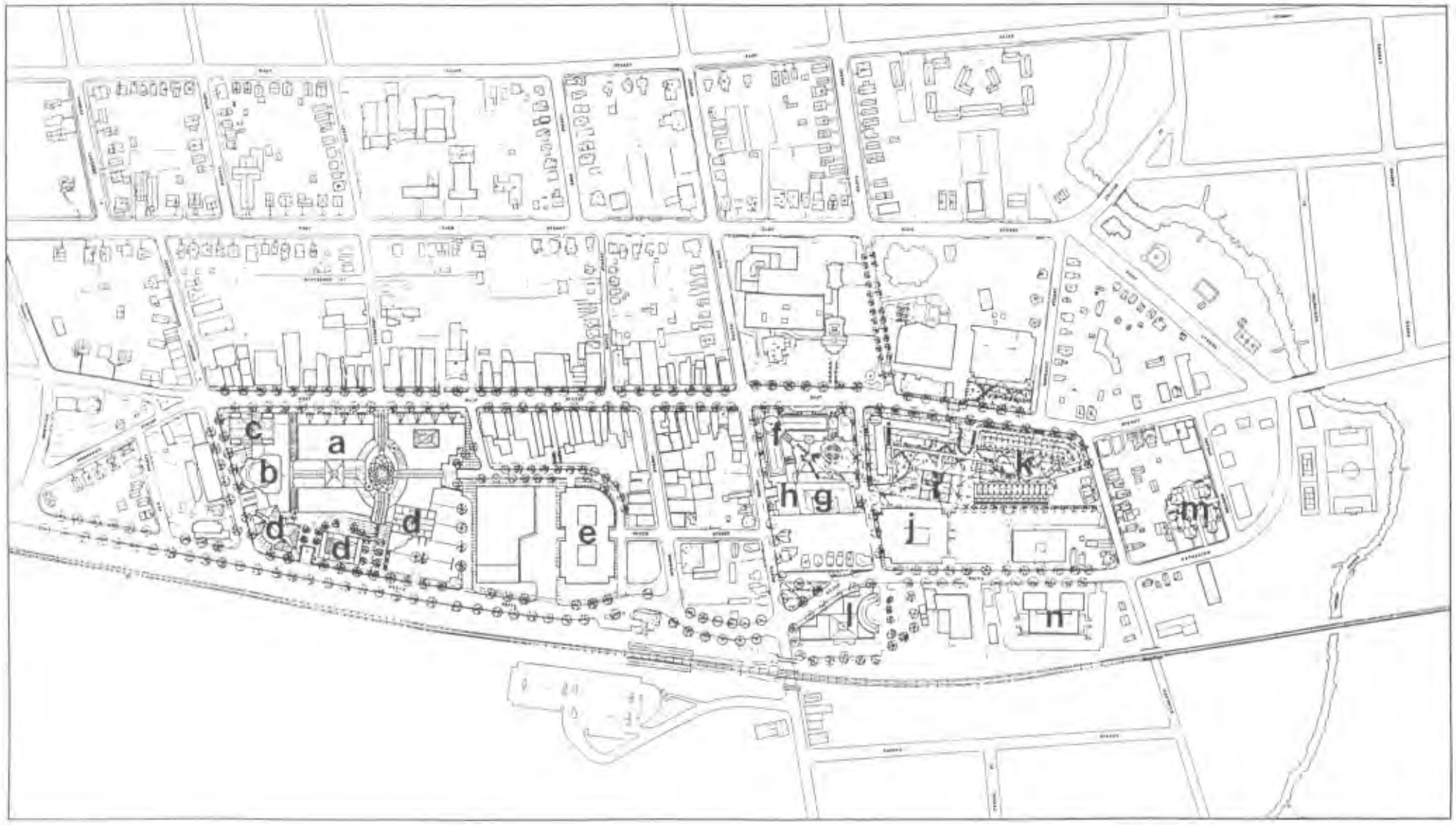
APPENDIX — THE VISION

The following is an illustrative vision of what downtown Somerville could become based upon the time tested principles and an existing urban fabric established over generations of development described in prior sections of this report. The vision confirms the importance of existing elements and attempts to identify priority projects needed to make the vision a reality. Most of all the Vision Plan represents belief in the ability of the people of Somerville to move downtown forward into the next century and to make a better community for ourselves and for future generation. The following diagrams and drawings indicate only one of many possible interpretations of the vision and is not intended to be an exact replication of Somerville in the future.

The Vision Plan proposes a framework and principles for the continued development of downtown Somerville. The details of the vision will be changed and modified over time, but the principles and the framework used to create the vision will remain as benchmarks for future public and private decisions.

Main Street/Commercial District

The vision for downtown Somerville begins with Main Street and the existing commercial district. Main Street is a traditional downtown commercial street lined with one-of-a-kind shops providing personalized service where costumers are known and greeted by name. People live and work in upper level residences and offices above the ground level retail. Building facades and storefronts have been renovated with the aid of a loan program sponsored by local banks, returning the street to the character of the original late 19th and early 20th century architecture. Sidewalks are newly paved with attractive pavers. Additional streetscape elements include period style street lamps and street furniture, landscaping, information kiosks, newspaper stands, public telephones, signage and public art. Alleyways connecting off-street parking lots to Main Street are landscaped providing safe, attractive access between parking and shopping. The sidewalks, street furniture and plantings are kept well maintained and clean.



SOMERSET ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE
TASK FORCE ON TOWN CENTERS

VISION PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE

SOMERVILLE, NEW JERSEY

MOLINARO/RUBIN ASSOC.
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
WILES
DAILEY
PRONSKE

Revised 9/13/91

VISION PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

LANDMARK SITE

Phase One

- Retail
- Entertainment
- Office
- Parking Structure (below grade)

Phase Two

- Office (three buildings)
- Parking

PUBLIC PARKING

EASTERN GATEWAY SITE

Hotel/Housing Site

- Hotel with ground level retail
- Health Club
- Residential (above parking structure)
- Parking Structure (above grade)

Office Site

- Two office buildings with ground level retail
- Parking Structure(above grade)

Residential Site

- 2 - 3 story apartment/townhouses
- Structured Parking below the residential units

Community/Civic Center Site

- 2-3 stories
- Community center/meeting rooms
- Potential library expansion
- Possible site for the relocation of the Lincoln Hos
- Elder Care/Day Care

Other community facilities

Meadow Street Residential Project

32-Unit residential project proposed by Community Caring for its Own

Proposed Office Project

Mixed-Use Anchors

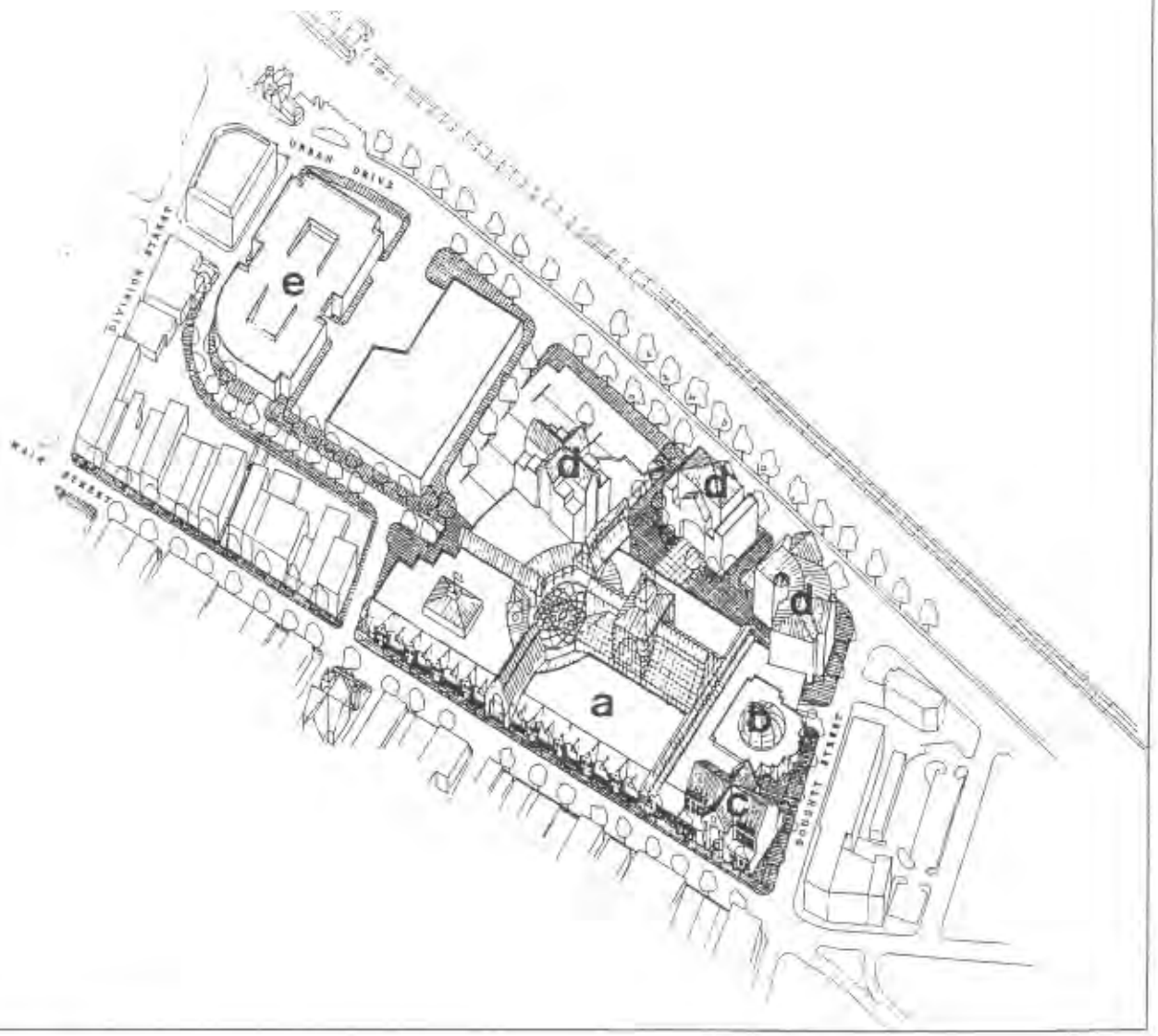
The Vision Plan proposes two mixed-use developments as anchors on Main Street.

Landmark Site

The Landmark mall at the west end of Main Street has been completely revamped as a two level specialty retail, conference, and entertainment attraction. The retail component of the project fronts Main Street and features restaurants, specialty shops and a Winter Garden. The Winter Garden functions as an informal gathering and performance space for the community.

The conference and entertainment component of the development includes a telecommunications entertainment center showing live sports and cultural programs via satellite from around the world. Flexible spaces and facilities allow meetings and conferences to be scheduled by area corporations. The entertainment component attracts patrons to downtown evenings and weekends as well as during the weekday. The open space at the heart of the retail center forms one of several downtown "quadrangles"; districts which attract people year round to informal outdoor activity spaces. The Pathmark Supercenter and specialty food stores are located on the site. The development also includes four new office buildings. Office workers provide daytime patrons for the new retail center as well as for the shops and restaurants on Main Street.

Parking for the new development is provided under the retail and office structures. A new parking structure on South Street provides additional parking to serve both the new development and the existing Main Street and Division Street shops.



SOMERSET ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE
TASK FORCE ON TOWN CENTERS

VISION PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE

LANDMARK SITE

SOMERVILLE, NEW JERSEY

MOLINARO/RUBIN ASSOC.
in association with
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DAILEY
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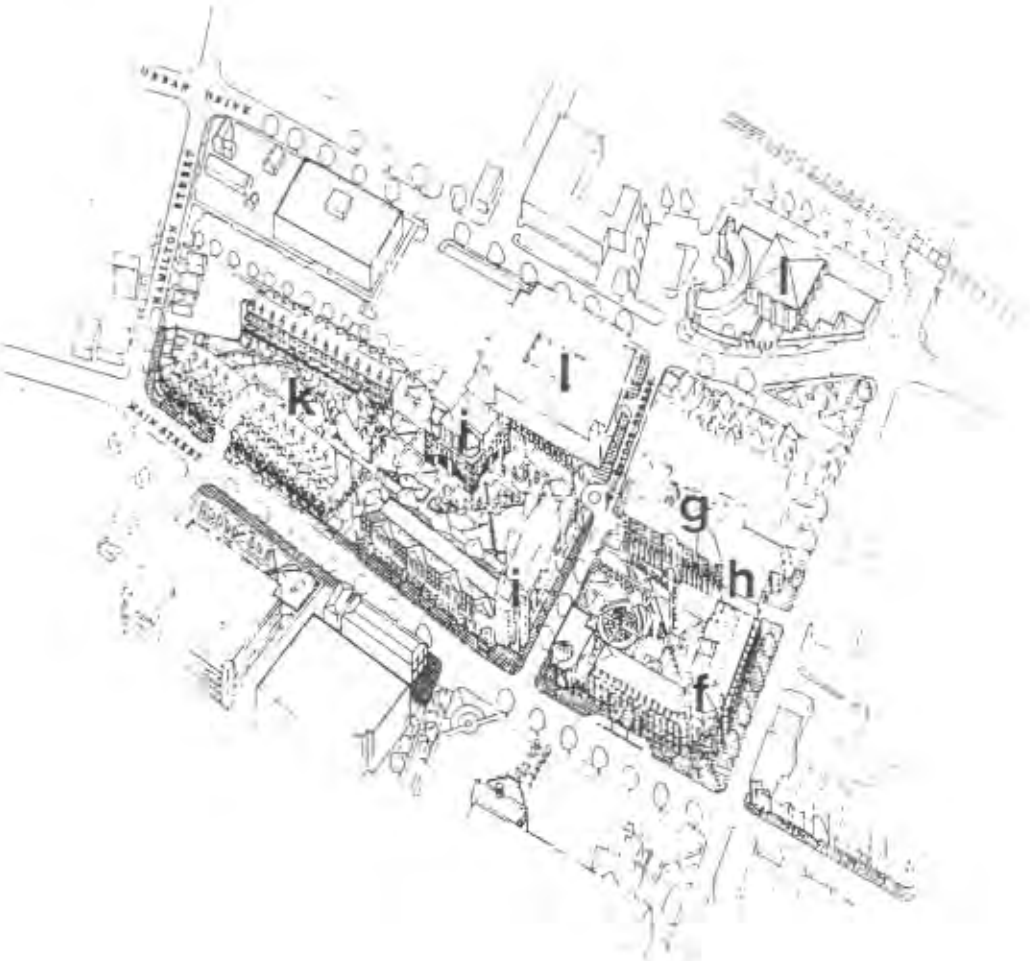
Eastern Gateway Site

The eastern gateway site includes the two blocks bounded by East Main Street, Hamilton Street, Franklin Street (Urban Drive extension) and South Bridge Street. It is composed of several new projects designed around the quadrangles concept.

The block bounded by South Bridge Street, East Main Street, Warren Street and Franklin Street features a five-story catering to the business traveler with ground level retail, a health club and a day care center. The hotel has views to the County Court House and to the interior quadrangle. Parking for the development is provided in a four-level parking structure. Residential units are located on top of the parking structure overlooking the quadrangle. The existing houses remain at the south end of the block facing Franklin Street. The Lincoln Hose Company has been relocated.

The west end of the block bounded by Warren Street, East Main Street, Hamilton Street and Franklin Street features a four-story office development with ground level retail and a parking structure surrounding a quadrangle. Court House Square South, housing the New Jersey Department of Labor offices, remains on Franklin Street. On the south side of Franklin Street is a new office development.

The east end of the Eastern Gateway abuts against the Hamilton Street neighborhood. Existing residences and Community Caring For Its Own remain on Hamilton Street. A new multi-family residential development located at the northeast corner of the block provides a transition from the commercial developments to the existing neighborhood. Parking for the new residential development is provided below the housing units. The residential development is two and three stories tall and is designed to be compatible in scale and architectural features with the existing neighborhood.



SOMERSET ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE
TASK FORCE ON TOWN CENTERS

VISION PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN SOMERVILLE
EASTERN GATEWAY SITE

SOMERVILLE, NEW JERSEY

MOLINARO/RUBIN ASSOC.
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Cultural & Public Facilities

Existing, new and expanded cultural and public facilities attract thousands of people to downtown. New informational and directional signs, and promotional materials and campaigns a part of a coordinated management program inform county residents of attractions such as the Firemen's Museum, the Wallace House and the Old Dutch Parsonage, and of events such as street fairs, concerts and Friday Night Cruzin'. Banners along Main Street herald the upcoming Kugler-Anderson Memorial Tour of Somerville and the U. S. Bicycling Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame has expanded facilities including a display gallery.

The First Reformed Dutch Church located next to the County Court House has been transformed from a jurors' waiting room to a venue for live entertainment. The church provides the largest indoor concert hall in the area. Among the events held at the church is a series of jazz concerts.

At the corner of South Bridge Street and Urban Drive extension is a new community center. The community center includes space for an expanded library, meeting rooms for Borough Council, board and committees, space for the municipal court, and other public needs, such as child care and elder care.

Commercial District Management

A management program that includes a full-time staff manages the commercial district. The management program promotes and markets downtown retail and events, and provides maintenance of the public spaces. The management program also works with property owners to help fill vacancies with appropriate retail tenants. Coordination of events and a leasing strategy with Bridgewater Commons strengthens both as a symbiotic regional center.

Residential

Downtown features a variety of residential types providing housing for people of different income levels, and varying ages from single adults to families with children to senior citizens. In addition to the existing neighborhoods the Meadow Street Housing project is completed and occupied. The Hamilton Street and Park Avenue neighborhoods are flourishing with new infill residences adjacent to the park. Residents of the new housing developments in the Eastern Gateway project can leave their children at the day care center and walk to the NJ Transit station to commute to work. Young adults living in newly converted apartments above retail on Main Street and Division Street take advantage of the active night life.

Transition District — Commercial Opportunity Site

The New Jersey Savings Bank site and the adjacent block are developed as an important office and employment development servicing the bank's corporate and providing additional office space for professional uses within walking distance of County government offices and courts, and only a block away from Main Street stores and shops. The development provides an edge to the central business district and is sensitive in scale and design to the adjacent residential district, providing a buffer the neighborhoods and the CBD.

Transit

Downtown continues to be served by NJ Transit, train and bus, and by SCOOT. A new addition to transit serving downtown is a Shuttle linking downtown Somerville, Bridgewater Commons and nearby employment centers. The shuttle expands downtown's market base and enhances the downtown/Commons relationship as a regional center.